

DRAFT: Preparing For Council Meetings

Advice for New Alders Working through a Council Agenda

Welcome to the Common Council! One of your main tasks will be to participate in Common Council meetings. The agendas for these meetings are intense documents, with many pages of items for the Council to review and act on. The tutorial on navigating a council agenda will help orient you to the sections and items most commonly found on a Council agenda. Here are some additional tips for preparing for a Council meeting.

We strongly recommend that you plan to dedicate at least several hours between when the agenda is released and the day of the meeting to reviewing the agenda and reaching out to staff with your questions.

Never hesitate to ask questions! We are here to assist you through the process.

As you gain experience with the process, you will develop your own unique way of tackling the Council agenda. Even experienced alders find it can take several months to years to feel fully comfortable with everything you will encounter on an agenda.

Priority Reviewing an Agenda

An agenda may be 30-40 pages long and the attachments can range into the thousands of pages. The agenda is released most often on the Friday before the meeting, which means there is a limited amount of time for you to familiarize yourself with the items on the agenda and ask clarifying questions to City staff.

Once the agenda is released (an email will be sent to all alders), do a priority review for the following things, including clicking on the file number for each item to familiarize yourself with it:

- Items you are sponsoring
- Items listing your district
- Items coming from a board, commission, or committee (BCC) of which you are a member
- New items being introduced for referral without debate (listed toward end of agenda)

Next, do a review of the rest of the agenda. **Tip:** the Drafter's Analysis is a good place to start when familiarizing yourself with proposed ordinances. Review the *How to Find Files in Legistar* tutorial for more information on how to find this.

Write down the Legistar file numbers and the agenda number for each item you have questions about. If you have questions on any of these items for staff, send those questions as soon as you can. Don't hesitate to ask questions! Staff members,

especially agency heads, are usually quite responsive in the days before a Council meeting. You can also reach out to the alder sponsoring an item you have questions about. **Tip:** avoid a walking quorum of Council members by limiting your contact to the sponsoring alder only and not discussing your position with multiple alders (review the *OCA Open Meetings* tutorial for more information on walking quorum).

Excluding Items for Consent Agenda Document

Once you have reviewed the agenda and asked your questions, if you have further questions or would like to exclude the item from the consent agenda for discussion or for adding additional committee referrals, contact Liz in the Council Office **before noon** on the Council meeting day. **Note:** items introduced for referral only without debate cannot be discussed at that time. Review the *Understanding the Consent Agenda & Consent Agenda Document* tutorial for more information on this document. You are also able to exclude the item from the floor by making that request when the Council president is reading the consent agenda.

At the Meeting

The format for upcoming Council meetings are listed on the agenda ahead of time, so you will know whether it is possible to join virtually or in person. **[clip of example?]** If joining in person in CCB 201, the chamber is usually open shortly after 6 p.m. for you to find your seat. Your nameplate will indicate which seat is yours. Bring your laptop so you can reference the agenda and agenda items, review the list of registered speakers, and send any emails as needed during the meeting. Please silence your laptop and phone during the meeting. Consider bringing hydration and snacks since meetings may be several hours long.